

## P. Gabrielle Foreman



Paterno Chair of Liberal Arts, Professor of English,  
African American Studies, and History  
Penn State University

### Public Lecture Offerings

#### **Why Didn't We Know?!: The Forgotten History of the Colored Conventions and 19th-Century Black Political Organizing**

How is it possible for history to have sidelined seven full decades of early African American organizing? In this talk, attendees will learn about an ongoing campaign for Black rights which served as the prequel to the NAACP, Civil Rights, and Black Lives Matter movements. From 1830 through the beginning of the new century, free, fugitive, and freed Black Americans held multi-day "Colored Conventions" all across North America. African American leaders not only came together to demand Black freedom, but to advocate for all it entails then as now: educational equity, labor justice, voting, jury, and political rights, as well as freedom from state-sanctioned violence. Why didn't we know?

#### **From Juneteenth to July 4th, an American Invitation**

What would it mean to think about the fifteen days between Juneteenth and July 4th as a bridge between the democratic aspirations that the 4th articulates and the embodied freedom that Juneteenth has come to represent for Black Americans? This talk revisits the history of Juneteenth before turning to discussions raised by Black artists and poets about what is represented—and what is left out—in the ways we've come to understand the United States' founding dates and documents.

## **His Page Was Clay: How an Enslaved Potter and Poet Became a Museum Superstar**

Today, David Drake's ceramic vessels are found in the most renowned museums across the United States. Often incised with original poetry and signed "Dave," his pots are counted among the largest and most accomplished to be made in the nineteenth century. In 2021, one sold for \$1.5 million. Yet, this artist spent almost his entire life enslaved in South Carolina; his friends and family members could be sold off as easily as the wares he was known for even then. In addition to being famous for his pots, Drake is perhaps the only Black writer, free or enslaved, to create surviving literature that never appeared in print. His page was clay. This talk introduces audiences to David Drake's pottery and poetry and shares how he has inspired a generation of visual artists and poets who came after him.

### **Classroom Discussion Topics**

#### **Why Digital Histories and Research Matter**

In this workshop, students will dig into interactive online exhibits featured at [ColoredConventions.org](https://coloredconventions.org) and the early [Black Women's Organizing Archive](https://blackwomen.org). Students will then compose teaching questions that the class will workshop together. Through an iterative process throughout my visits, students will become producers—not just consumers—of knowledge, as these questions are added to exhibit teaching tabs that teachers and students use in their classes. Student pairs will need computer access.

### **Bringing Forgotten Histories to Life through Undergraduate Research**

In this conversation, I'll present my collaborations with Sharing Our History Dance Theater and the award-winning Colored Conventions Project. The class will then discuss what they have learned—or would want to learn—in their own undergraduate research experiences. On site faculty will provide a list of offices and opportunities at their own university. Students will leave with a plan that covers how and when to approach faculty and programs so they can include these rich intellectual opportunities in their own academic journeys.

### **Writing about Slavery/Teaching about Slavery: This Might Help**

In 2018, slavery scholars from across the United States contributed to this crowdsourced guide. Since then, it has been assigned in thousands of high school and university classes. It has also been consulted by editors, museum curators, presses, and journalists in North America and beyond. Scholars of Roman slavery use it regularly. Its suggestions have been adopted by the National Scottish Museum. In this workshop, we'll join the tens of thousands of others who have used this crowdsourced guide to begin to deepen discussions about slavery and about why and how language matters.